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PARIS FOR D'ELIA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TO](#)
SUBJECT: TOGO: NATIONAL DIALOGUE UNDERWAY -- ALL PARTIES ON BOARD

REF: (A) LOME 0418 (B) LOME 0332 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DAVID B. DUNN, REASONS 1.4 (B AND D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Following a preliminary launch last November, the Togolese national dialogue resumed in earnest on April 21. The opening came after much controversy concerning the venue and need for an outside mediator/facilitator, including a boycott threat by the principal opposition party. All parties to the dialogue participated in the opening session, chaired by Prime Minister Edem Kodjo, who presumably will continue in that role. A Burkinabe minister representing President Blaise Compaore, once considered the leading candidate to facilitate the dialogue, is attending as an observer. The Prime Minister's opening speech, delivered on behalf of President Faure Gnassingbe, was conciliatory and forthcoming in terms of the subjects to be addressed in the dialogue -- all major opposition grievances are on the table. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Ambassador attended the opening substantive session of the Togolese national dialogue on Friday, April 21. Invitations to the opening were not issued until late Thursday afternoon, although the Friday launch had been rumored over the past several days and the participants themselves had received notification earlier (see septel report of April 20 meeting with opposition leaders).

¶3. (C) In the end, all the major parties to the dialogue attended at a senior level, including Patrick Lawson and Jean-Pierre Fabre of the Union of Forces for Change (UFC). (UFC president Gilchrist Olympio, who resides in Paris, was never expected to attend, though the UFC has announced a three day visit to Lome by Gilchrist in connection with Togolese independence day April 27.) The UFC had threatened publicly to boycott the dialogue if a: there were no outside facilitator, or b: it were held outside Togo; it thus got half of what it wanted. More important to the UFC's decision to participate, in the Embassy's view, was its desire not to miss the opportunity to have its views heard or to test the GOT's intentions, a point that we have pressed.

¶4. (SBU) President Faure's address, delivered by the prime minister, struck the right notes. He began by saluting the memory of past victims of political violence, especially in recent (i.e., last year's) events. Referring to the consultations that had taken place among parties to the dialogue since the official launch last November, he said the process ultimately had demonstrated consensus on the broad objectives of the dialogue as well as the mechanics. He characterized the GOT's 22 engagements to the EU in the areas of democracy, human rights, and governance as the cornerstone of the dialogue but promised that the government would not dodge other key issues identified by the participants, among

them the return of the refugees from last year's violence, compensation to the victims of that violence, reform of Togo's security services, and the wider question of impunity (an opposition watchword for abuses by the Eyadema regime, including ethnic favoritism).

15. (SBU) Although clarification is still lacking on some of the mechanics to be followed, the participants seem satisfied with the prime minister serving as chair, at least in the opening stages, the roughly ten day duration, and the Lome venue. As chair of the dialogue, the prime minister's affiliation with a political party other than Eyadema's RPT gives him greater acceptability (if not credibility, as some in the opposition have accused him of selling out).

16. (C) Comment. The GOT's patience in ensuring that all parties could accept the dialogue in the form that it is (finally) taking place has paid off, at least for now. Although the lead-up has been messy and has seen a number of outside players come and go, notably regarding the question of a mediator, the ability of the Togolese parties to make the necessary compromises is cause for cautious optimism regarding the dialogue itself. Key stumbling blocks, in the Embassy's view, will be the questions of military reform and guarantees/enforcement mechanisms to ensure that what is agreed actually takes place. End Comment.

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